



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GOD GIVEN: Cultural Treasures of Armenia Exhibition

Before she left, Janine Webb, the North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA)'s previous Executive Director, worked with the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) to secure a permanent art gallery at the SHSND's Heritage Center and State Museum in Bismarck, North Dakota. The NDCA, in partnership with the SHSND, will use this gallery space to highlight the arts and artists of North Dakota. Discussions for programming efforts related to the exhibits are ongoing.

The first of the exhibits, valued at nearly \$100,000, opened in conjunction with the Heritage Center and the State Museum's grand re-opening on November 2, after a lengthy and beautiful expansion project. This exhibit, titled *God Given: Cultural Treasures of Armenia*, will be on display for one year and features the work of traditional/folk artists Norik and Irina Astvatsaturov. (Their name in the Armenian language translates to "God Given.") Norik, Irina, and their children came to North Dakota as refugees fleeing ethnic and religious persecution from Baku, Azerbaijan.

Their artwork is representative of their heritage, history, and experiences. Norik is a Bush Foundation Artist Fellowship recipient whose work includes ornately created copper and bronze repoussé work with inlaid semi-precious stones – jewelry boxes, crosses, icons, plates, and other items are created by hand. Irina was an art teacher in Baku and learned Russian and Eastern European beadwork as a child and young adult. Her work includes elaborate and colorful beadwork on black velvet – iconographic beadwork, flowers, and birds. Birds are a powerful motif for Irina as they remind her of "people flying away like birds" to escape the life-and-death violence and struggles her family and others from Baku endured.

The exhibit is augmented with an award-winning publication written by the NDCA's folklorist, Troyd Geist, featuring Norik's work. In addition, a short documentary created in partnership between the NDCA and Prairie Public will air repeatedly in the Heritage Center and State Museum's new theater. The documentary explores Norik's artwork in context of the upheaval in Baku and the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region between Christian Armenians and Moslem Azerbaijanis. Both the publication and the documentary are also titled *God Given: Cultural Treasures of Armenia*.

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The North Dakota Council on the Arts is the state agency responsible for the support and development of the arts throughout North Dakota, and is funded by the state legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts.